

Canada's Families





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Canada's Families

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Introduction

Many Canadians spend their lives as family members. The census family consists of a married couple with or without never-married children living in the same dwelling or a lone parent living with one or more never-married children. In 1976 there were about 5 3/4 million families in Canada.

Over the years, many changes have taken place in the traditional structure of the family. The 1976 Census shows that family size is now smaller than previously, that the number of lone-parent families is increasing and that more and more persons are getting divorced.

Further, a greater proportion of married women are now working outside the home, many of them pursuing careers. Their new role is supported by revolutionary changes in food marketing and home appliances, thus making housekeeping relatively less time-consuming.

In response to changing values, the family has emerged in its modern form - smaller, more economically active and more ready to disband if things are not working out between husband and wife.

**CONSUMER INCOME &
EXPENDITURE**

Family, Marriage and Divorce



Canadian families are on the increase

Families in Canada increased in number by 13.4% between the censuses of 1971 and 1976, by an additional 674,729 families. The four largest provinces accounted for 86.1% of the total increase — Ontario with 33.7%, Quebec with 27.7%, British Columbia with

14.5% and Alberta with 10.2%. All other provinces and territories made a total contribution of less than 14.0%. As expected, the numerical increase and regional distribution of new families basically follow the distribution of the general population.

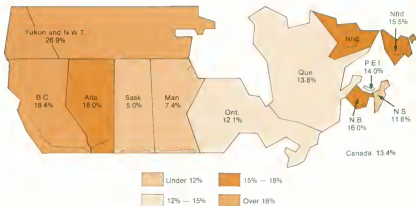
Greater increase in the eastern and western provinces

But the increase in the number of families in each province shows a different pattern. Provinces with the greatest increases were British Columbia (18.4%), Alberta (18.0%), New Brunswick (16.0%) and Newfoundland (15.5%).

(15.5%). In fact, all the provinces and territories showed a percentage increase in the number of families, including Saskatchewan (5.0%) which had a drop in population of almost 5,000 persons.

Chart 1

Percentage Increase in the Number of Families, Canada and Provinces, 1971-1976



Source: 1976 Census of Canada Catalogue 93-821, Table 1

But the age of the bridegroom is falling

Men, it seems, now prefer to marry at an earlier age than was previously the case. Since 1941, their average age at first marriage has decreased by 2.6 years while that for women has fallen by 1.7 years.

The decrease in age at marriage may reflect the fact

that women are now more financially independent than ever before. Because of this, men no longer feel that they need to have saved up a large sum of money for their marriage.

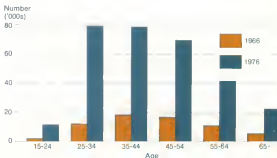
More marriages, but growing numbers of divorces

Marriages today can be dissolved more easily than was the case 10 years ago. Since the passing of the Divorce Act in 1968, the divorce rate has quadrupled, from 54.8 divorces per 100,000 population in 1968 to 235.8 in 1976.

Between the censuses of 1966 and 1976, the proportion of the divorced population to the total population 15 years and over had increased from 0.5% to 1.8%; by 1976 there was a total of 302,535 divorced persons. The vast majority of the divorced are over the age of 30 and most live in urban areas.

Chart 2

Numerical Distribution of Divorced Population 15 Years and Over by Age, Canada, 1966 and 1976



Source: 1966 Census of Canada, Catalogue 92-613, Table 34
1976 Census of Canada, Catalogue 92-625, Table 22

Are couples marrying too young? Or does the breakup of marriages reflect the changing values of our society? Despite the breakup of marriages, marriage continues to be popular. Just as there have been more divorces, so there

have been more remarriages. In 1976, 13.4% of all bridegrooms and 11.9% of all brides were from marriages that had been dissolved, whereas in 1966 this was the case for only 4.6% of all bridegrooms and 4.3% of all brides.

More Canadians are getting married

For most of us, marriage is one of the highlights of life. Parents and society prepare us for this important occasion from childhood on, so it's no wonder that about nine out of 10 adults will marry at least once during their lifetimes. But how does marriage stand up to the changing values of today's society?

In 1976 almost two-thirds (64.2%) of Canada's adult population (15+) were married. This has not always been the case; in 1901, for example, just over half (52.0%) of the adult

population were married, while in 1931 only 56.1% of them were married.

Furthermore, recent figures show that between 1971 and 1976 the number of married persons increased by 1.2 million. So it would seem that marriage is more popular than ever. Much of the recent increase can be explained by the changing age structure of Canada's population; there are now more persons in the prime marriageable age group (20-34 years) than before.

Couples now marry at an earlier age and women marry men older than themselves

The years between 1941 and 1976 have brought a reduction in the average age of brides and grooms never previously married. In 1941 the average age of grooms was 27.6 years while their brides averaged 24.4 years. By 1972 the age of grooms and brides had dropped to an all-time low of 24.7 years and 22.2 years, respectively. In recent years, however, there has been a slight tendency for the average age of grooms and brides to increase — the average age in 1976 was 25 years for grooms and 22.7 years for brides.

The long-term decline in age of marriage partly reflects the favourable economic conditions

of the 1950's and 1960's - these years were conducive to economic independence (that is, children could leave the parental home and start a new family). Young couples of today, however, may postpone their marriage because of the mid-1970's economic uncertainties and their growing interest in post-secondary education.

The difference in ages between brides and grooms shows that women marry men who are, on an average, two or three years older than themselves. But over the years, there has been a narrowing in age differences between brides and grooms.

Table 1

Average Difference in Age for Bridegrooms and Brides at First Marriage, 1941-1976

Year	1941	1951	1961	1971	1976
Average difference in age	3.2	2.8	2.9	2.3	2.3

Source: Vital Statistics, 1976, Catalogue 84-205 (Annual), Table 3.

People don't remain divorced for long. The average length of time that men and women remain divorced was estimated to be less than three years in 1971 (not including the period

of separation). In 1961 it was estimated to be four years. The divorced population, however, constitutes only a small proportion of the adult population.

Chart 3

Percentage Distribution of Population 15 Years and Over by Marital Status, Canada, 1976



(i) Single (never married)

(ii) Married (includes separated)

Source: 1976 Census of Canada, Catalogue 92-825, Table 22

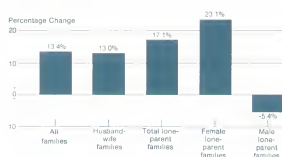
One in 10 families is a lone-parent family and the majority of these parents are women

In 1976 there were 559,330 lone-parent families, an increase of 81,805 since 1971. This represents a percentage

increase of 17.1. In the same period of time, husband-wife families increased by only 13.0%.

Chart 4

Percentage Change in Families by Family Structure, Canada, 1971-1976



Source: 1976 Census of Canada, Catalogue 93-822, Table 6

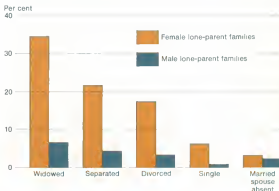
The single most important fact about lone-parent families is that in 83% of them, the parent is a woman. Furthermore, they have increased by 23.1% during the five-year intercensal period, whereas the percentage of male parents in lone-parent families actually declined by 5.4%.

Why are the majority of the parents in these families

women? One of the major reasons is the differences in death rates between men and women. Over a third (34.5%) of all lone parents are widows. Another important reason is that children generally live with the mother when marriages break up; 39.2% of female lone parents are separated and divorced.

Chart 5

Percentage Distribution of Lone-parent Families by Marital Status and Sex of Parent, Canada, 1976



Source: 1976 Census of Canada, Catalogue 93-833, Table 6

Family Size



More families, but fewer people per family

Although there are more families today than previously, average family size is smaller. The average number of persons per family in 1971 was 3.7; by 1976 it had dropped to 3.5.

This decline was experienced by all the provinces and

territories. The most marked decline in that five-year period took place in Quebec, where family size was reduced from 3.9 persons per family to 3.5. Ontario and British Columbia showed the smallest declines (from 3.6 to 3.4 and from 3.5 to 3.3, respectively).

Family size is smallest in Western Canada and largest in Eastern Canada

The most striking feature about family size is the difference between the eastern and western provinces. The extremes in family size are represented by Newfoundland, which has a high of 4.0 persons per family and British Columbia, which has a low of 3.3 persons

per family. Furthermore, there appears to be a general inverse relationship between the degree of urbanization and family size. For example, Ontario is highly urbanized and has one of the smallest averages for family size.

Table 2

Total Number of Families and Average Number of Persons per Family, for Canada and Provinces, 1976

Canada and provinces	Total number of families	Average number of persons per family ⁽¹⁾
Newfoundland	124,653	4.0
Prince Edward Island	27,560	3.7
Nova Scotia	200,480	3.5
New Brunswick	162,033	3.7
Quebec	1,540,402	3.5
Ontario	2,104,541	3.4
Manitoba	251,974	3.4
Saskatchewan	225,686	3.5
Alberta	448,768	3.5
British Columbia	628,445	3.3
Yukon	4,931	3.5
Northwest Territories	8,422	4.3
Canada	5,727,895	3.5

(1) These averages are for all census families - this includes husband-wife families with and without children as well as lone-parent families.

Source: 1976 Census of Canada, Catalogue 93-821, Table 1.

Nuclearization of families

Today's families have fewer children

One striking trend among Canadian families is the decrease in the tendency to double up, or live in a multi-family household. Whereas past generations saw many households containing two or more (often related) families,

The reduction in family size is partly a reflection of the smaller number of children per family. In 1961 the average number of children per family was 1.9; it fell to 1.8 in 1971 and by 1976 it had fallen to 1.6 children per family.

the modern family has been able to afford the privacy and independence of a separate dwelling. In 1951, 6.7% of households contained more than one family. This percentage dropped to 2.0% by 1971 and to 1.3% in 1976.

Furthermore, the percentage of families with four or more children has declined. Over 16.4% of Canada's families had four or more children in 1961, but by 1976 this percentage had dropped to 9.7%.

Table 3

Percentage Distribution of Families by Number of Children⁽¹⁾ at Home, for Canada, 1961, 1971 and 1976

Number of children	1961	1971	1976 ⁽²⁾
0	29.3	30.5	30.1
1	20.2	20.6	23.7
2	20.6	21.2	23.9
3	13.4	13.3	12.6
4	7.5	7.2	5.7
5 or more	8.9	7.1	3.9

(1) Before 1976 the definition of children included only those children 24 years and under. The definition of children was expanded in 1976 to include never-married children 25 years and over living at home.

(2) The family universe in 1976 includes only those who live in private occupied dwellings. Source: 1961 Census of Canada, Catalogue 93-514, Table 49.

1971 Census of Canada, Catalogue 93-715, Table 14.

1976 Census of Canada, Catalogue 93-823, Table 12.

One of the advantages of a small family is that the parents are more able to provide economic support for their children. But many families in the future may find that the husband and wife spend a

longer time alone after the children have left home. Already there is a trend towards couples having children at earlier ages and for children to leave home at younger ages. These reasons plus the fact

that people now live longer will increase the likelihood of couples living alone for a longer period of time.

The trend towards fewer children, however, could be reversed. Many couples from the baby-boom generation (those persons born in the late

1940's and the 1950's) have not yet completed their family size. Once they have their own homes and are secure in their jobs, they may decide to increase their family sizes. We must wait for future censuses to tell us what these people have decided.

Urban families are smaller than rural families

It's a well-known fact that family size in urban areas is smaller than in rural areas. Canada's families are no exception.

Families living in urban areas in 1976 had an average of 1.5 children, while those living in rural non-farm areas had 1.7 and those in rural farm areas had 2.1 children. Generally, the larger the size of the city, the smaller the average number of children in the family.

How do we account for this relationship? Do parents living

in cities find it more difficult to raise large families? It may be that life-styles in cities discourage large numbers of children. Added to this is the greater cost of raising children in cities, especially with the high housing costs coupled with the increasing number of working mothers.

Furthermore, many young families move to the suburbs to raise their children. Some may return to the larger cities once their children have left home.

Table 4

Families and Average Number of Children per Family, for Canada, Urban Size Groups, Rural Non-farm and Rural Farm, 1976

Canada	Total families	Percentage	Average number of children in family
Canada	5,727,895	100.0	1.6
Urban	4,372,090	76.3	1.5
500,000 and over	2,152,230	37.6	1.4
100,000 - 499,999	803,710	14.0	1.5
30,000 - 99,999	461,300	8.1	1.5
1,000 - 29,999	954,850	16.7	1.6
Rural	1,355,805	23.7	1.8
Non-farm	1,120,985	19.6	1.7
Farm	234,820	4.1	2.1

Source: 1976 Census of Canada, Catalogue 93-823, Table 12.

The 1976 Census counted 1,048,355 children belonging to lone-parent families

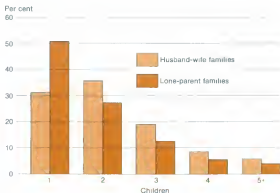
In contrast to husband-wife families, 50.8% of all lone-parent families have only one (never-married) child at home, a further 27.1% have two children and 22.2% have three or more children.

About a third (34.6%) of these children are aged 18 or over.

This is not surprising since a fairly high proportion of lone parents are widows who have already completed their families. In comparison, only 18.7% of the children of husband-wife families are in this age group.

Chart 6

Percentage Distribution of Children at Home for Husband-wife Families and Lone-parent Families, Canada, 1976



Source: 1976 Census of Canada Catalogue 93-833, Table 2 and Catalogue 93-832, Table 6

The problems of lone parents with young children

Almost a third (31.6%) of female lone-parent families have at least one child aged under 15. The problems facing lone-parent families with young children could be particularly acute, especially for female lone parents because their earning power is generally lower than that for men. The decision to stay at home and look after their children full-time means that many of them may be relying on social assistance; lone fathers facing the same choice, however, could experience difficulties in qualifying for such assistance.

Those lone parents who want to go to work may have difficulties finding suitable day care facilities for their children.

Jobs that provide adequate incomes require higher qualifications and/or work experience. This could mean that many lone mothers are limited to part-time work and low-paid jobs. Many female lone parents will be competing with the growing number of women entering the labour force and this could affect their prospects of finding suitable employment.

Working Wives, Family Income and Family Expenditures



More and more wives
are working . . .

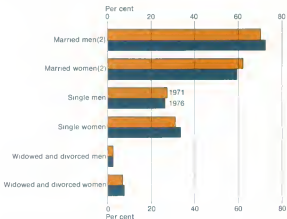
Between the censuses of 1971 and 1976, about 600,000 additional married women entered the labour force. In 1976 they totalled approximately 2.4 million and represented almost a quarter (23.7%) of Canada's labour force (and 62.3% of all women in the labour force). In 1971 married

women accounted for only 20.5% of the labour force.

During this same period of time, the number of married men in the labour force has also increased, from about 4.1 million to 4.5 million, but their share in Canada's labour force has dropped from 46.8% to 43.8% between 1971 and 1976.

Chart 7

Percentage Distribution(1) of Labour Force
by Sex and Marital Status, 1971 and 1976



(1) Shown as a percentage of all men and of all women in the labour force
(2) Includes separated

Source: 1976 Census of Canada, Catalogue 94-804, Table 10

. . . and many of them
have children

An increasing proportion of mothers (in husband-wife families) with dependent children are entering the labour force. Between 1971 and 1976 their percentage rose from 32.9% to 41.0%. The greatest increases were shown for young mothers 25 to 34 years

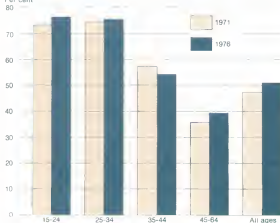
The percentage of childless wives in the labour force has also increased during the five years, but their increases were not as great at any level as those for mothers with dependent children.

Chart 8

Percentage of Wives Aged 15-64 in the Labour Force by Age and Presence of Dependent Children, Canada, 1971 and 1976

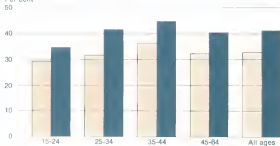
Wives without children under 15 years

Per cent



Wives with children under 15 years

Per cent



Source 1971 Census of Canada, Catalogue 99-725, Table 9
1976 Census of Canada, Catalogue 93-832, Table 13

At the same time the percentages of single and divorced women entering the labour force were increasing.

What do these changes mean for the family? Will family size get even smaller as more and more wives go to work? Will

maternity leave encourage couples to have more children - especially since the wife will be assured of her job? Whatever the outcome, it seems that the traditional role of the married woman as housewife and mother is being challenged.

Since the opportunities for working have increased for women, the husband is no longer considered the sole bread-winner. Also, many wives wish to pursue a career that is unhindered by having a large family.

Canadian families are economically better off now, but . . .

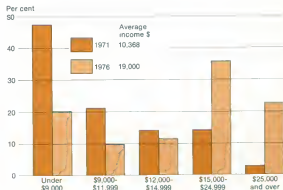
Canadian families have higher incomes now than previously. From here on we are talking about economic families. They are defined as a group of individuals sharing a common dwelling unit and related by blood, marriage or adoption.

In 1971 the proportion of families in the higher income

groups of \$15,000 or more was only 17.1. By 1976 this group had expanded to include 58.5% of all Canadian families (in current dollars). At the other end of the scale, the percentage of families in the under \$9,000 category had dropped from 47.5% to 20.2%.

Chart 9

Percentage Distribution of Economic Families by Income Groups in Current Dollars, 1971 and 1976



Source: Statistics Canada, Income Distribution by Size in Canada, 1976, Catalogue 13-207, Table 1

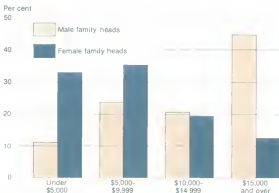
... incomes of male heads are twice as high as female heads of lone-parent families

The most noticeable difference in average income is found between heads of male and female lone-parent families. On average the income of a male head of family in 1975 was \$15,294. But the average income of a female head of family was only \$8,580. A third

(33.0%) of all families with female heads had incomes of less than \$5,000 in 1975. Nearly half (44.8%) of all male heads of lone-parent families had incomes of over \$15,000, compared to 12.3% for their female counterparts.

Chart 10

Percentage Distribution of Male and Female Lone-parent Families, by Income Groups, 1975



Source: Statistics Canada, Income Distribution by Size in Canada, 1975, Catalogue 13-207 Table 17

Why does a higher proportion of female-headed families belong to the lower income groups? The census shows that fewer women (46.8%) who were heads of lone-parent families in 1976 were in the labour force compared to men

(73.5%). Many women who do work do so only on a part-time basis due to family obligations. Also, women have not enjoyed the same opportunities for promotion as men. Furthermore, a large proportion of lone-parent families are older widows living off acquired assets and small incomes.

The Atlantic Provinces have the largest proportion of families with low incomes

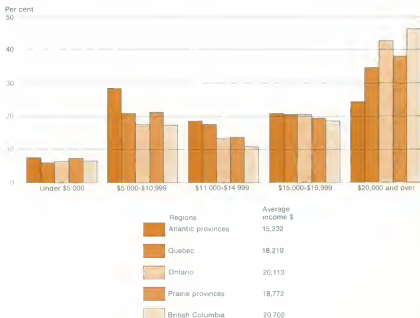
The average income for all families throughout Canada was \$19,000 in 1976. But many of the provinces and regions have average family incomes below the national average.

The Atlantic provinces, for example, have the lowest average family income

(\$15,232). Quebec also shows a relatively low average family income of \$18,219. British Columbia, on the other hand, has the highest (\$20,702). Both Ontario and British Columbia have over 40% of their families with incomes above \$20,000.

Chart 11

Percentage Distribution of Economic Families by Income Groups, Atlantic Provinces, Quebec, Ontario, Prairie Provinces and British Columbia, 1976



Source: Statistics Canada, Income Distribution by Size in Canada, 1976, Catalogue 13-207, Table 2

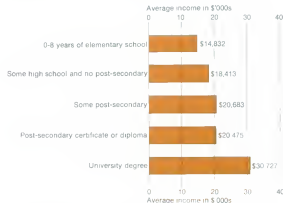
Education, age and income levels

Education is a very important determinant of income. In 1976, the average income of a family whose head had a university degree was \$30,000. For

families whose heads had completed only 0-8 years of schooling, the average income was \$15,000.

Chart 12

Average Income of Economic Families by Education of Head, 1976



Source: Statistics Canada, Income Distribution by Size in Canada, 1976 Catalogue 13-207, Table 7

The age of the head of the family is closely related to income differences. As we get older our income tends to rise,

reaching a peak when we are aged between 45 to 54, after which it tends to decline with retirement.

Table 5

Average Income of Economic Families by Age of Head, Canada, 1976

Age	24 and under	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
\$	14,019	18,358	21,526	23,178	19,417	11,848

Source: Statistics Canada, Income Distribution by Size in Canada, 1976, Catalogue 13-207 Table 4

Family size is related to income

Among families with children under age 16, families with four or more children tend to have lower incomes on average than

families with less than four children. This has been consistently the case over the years.

Table 6

Average Yearly Income (Current Dollars) of Economic Families With Children Under 16 Years, Canada, 1969 and 1976

Number of children under 16	1969	1976
Less than 4	\$9,298	\$19,822
4 or more	8,812	18,834

Source: Statistics Canada, Income Distribution by Size in Canada, 1976, Catalogue 13-207, Table 10.

Income Distribution by Size in Canada, 1969, Catalogue 13-544, Table 9.

How do families spend their incomes?

Some families spend greater proportions of their incomes on food and shelter than others. In 1976, for example, families of two or more persons (as reported in eight cities across Canada) with incomes under \$6,000 reported that over half (58.2%) of their budgets went on food and shelter. Families with incomes above \$35,000 reported that less than a quarter (23.3%) of their budgets went on the same items.

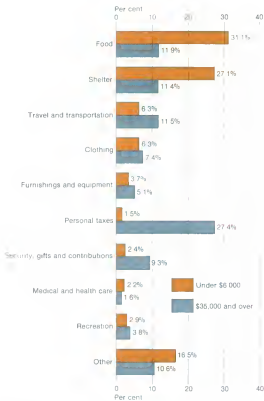
Other differences are also shown between these two income groups. Personal taxes

absorbed the greatest proportion (27.4%) of family expenditures for those with incomes above \$35,000. But for families with incomes of \$6,000 and less, personal taxes were one of the least important items of expenditure (1.5%).

A far greater proportion of families with incomes above \$35,000 were home-owners (86.1%) than were families with incomes below \$6,000 (31.3%). Also fewer families in the lower income group owned cars or trucks (28.5% as opposed to 93.2%).

Chart 13

Percentage Distribution of Family Expenditure by Family Income, for Eight Major Cities, Families of Two or More Persons, Canada, 1976



Source: Statistics Canada, Urban Family Expenditure, 1976, Non-catalogued Publication (Preliminary Information), Table 5

The future

Projections show that, by 1986, Canada's census families may number between 7.1 and 7.3 million. And by 2001, there could be between 8.4 and 9.1 million. The years of greatest increase are likely to occur from now until 1986, when families may grow at a rate of between 2.3% and 2.7% per annum. Most of this increase can be accounted for by the baby-boom generation which will continue to enter the prime ages of family formation during this period. By the end of this century, however, the rate of increase of families is expected to decrease considerably, to about 1% per annum, reflecting the low fertility levels of the 1960's and 1970's.

Family size is likely to become smaller in the future and social and financial independence will be of paramount importance to young families. Nuclearization of families is likely to continue into the 21st century as more families seek the privacy of their own dwelling. Nevertheless, telephones and efficient transportation will help families keep in touch with their kin.

Economic conditions and the mass media will have a considerable effect on the structure of the family. The breakup of marriages is no longer regarded as an unusual

occurrence. Already, the divorce rates of the 1970's indicate that nearly one-quarter of persons marrying between the ages of 15 and 25 (and born between 1946 and 1956) may be expected to obtain a divorce by the time they reach 75. The number of lone-parent families will increase, but improved day care facilities may enable more lone parents to take up or continue their careers. Furthermore, as growing numbers of women continue to enter the labour force, discrepancies in earnings between male- and female-headed families may lessen.

Husbands of the future may be more willing to let their wives be the bread-winner. Today's wives are making a greater contribution to family income. Already in Sweden, paternity leave is granted to fathers. They are given paid leave from work to look after their child during infancy. More and more eligible fathers in Sweden are taking advantage of this program. Can we expect the same in Canada?

Whatever changes do occur, we can expect the family to continue being the fundamental social unit in our society.

Canada has taken a census of population every ten years from 1851 and every five years from 1956. The last census was taken on June 1, 1976. The census data constitute the most important single source of information on the population of Canada by many geographic areas from the national and provincial levels down to smaller groups such as cities, towns and municipalities. These data include: information on the number of people who live in Canada; their characteristics such as age, sex, marital status, language, educational level and occupation; number and types of families; and types of dwellings. Census information is used for a variety of purposes by private individuals, governments at all levels, educational institutions, business people and other organizations.

As part of a programme to supplement 1976 Census statistical reports, a special

series of popular studies have been undertaken on selected topics of public interest. Each study is a description of major trends and patterns. The data used are from the 1976 Census and other relevant sources. This series is deliberately non-technical and is designed for use at the high school and community college/university levels. However, it could also be of interest to the general public and other groups, such as public libraries, media, politicians, community and neighbourhood groups, marketing people and educational publishers.

Canada's Families is the second in this series. It brings together under one cover highlights of information about the changes in our families. Other studies are being planned for future publication.

Produced by the Census and Household Surveys Field and the Information Division of Statistics Canada.

Many persons contributed to the production of this series. Edward Pryor was the originator of the project. It was carried out under the direction of Anatole Romaniuc, project manager and M. V. George, project leader.

The manuscript for this study was prepared in the Census and Household Surveys Field by

Leeroy Murray with professional help from Brian Harrison and members of the Consumer Income and Expenditure Division. A number of professionals from the Field made a valuable contribution in reviewing the manuscript.

Stan Boswell supervised the editing of the manuscript and Jim Power co-ordinated the design and art work.

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Toll-free access to the regional statistical information service is provided in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island by telephoning 1-800-565-7192. Throughout Saskatchewan, the Regina office can be reached by dialing 1-800-667-3524, and throughout Alberta, the Edmonton office can be reached by dialing 1-800-222-6400.

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